

# Higher sewer rate requested N-N

## Lake Utilities Dept. cites increased costs, flat revenues in presentation to commissioners

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The Lake County Utilities Department has asked county commissioners to approve a 4.76 percent increase in sewer rates.

During a recent presentation to commissioners, Utilities Department officials cited a need to address aging infrastructure, pay for additional debt service incurred by improvement projects while

### From the meeting

Officials from the Lake County

Utilities Department explain their needs.

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dealing with flat revenues caused by lack of new customers from the home building slowdown and declining usage from commercial cus-

tomers.

The Utilities Department's Sanitary Sewer Division operates and maintains the county's wastewater collection and treatment system that includes 750 miles of sanitary sewers and 52 wastewater pump stations collecting wastewater from the system's 37,410 customers.

Communities that use the Utilities Department for sewer service are Concord Township, Fairport Harbor, Grand

River, Madison Township, Mentor, Mentor-on-the-Lake, North Perry Village, Painesville Township, Perry Township and Perry Village.

The proposed increase would cost residential customers an additional \$1.12 per month or \$3.36 per quarterly billing and it would provide about \$550,000 annually in revenue, said Utilities Department Executive Director Rick Martin.

Customers now pay \$23.52

per month or \$70.56 per quarter, so the rates would increase to \$73.92 per quarter or \$24.64 per month.

Utilities Department officials anticipate new debt service for capital improvement projects of \$250,000 per year starting in 2012 for 30 years for the recently completed Kirtland Sanitary Sewer project and \$600,000 annually for 20 years starting in 2014 for the Madison Wastewater Treatment Plant expansion

and upgrade — an estimated \$16 million project that is set for bids early next year.

The last rate increase was 5.0 percent in 2009, which is the highest amount it can be raised, said Randy Rothlisberger, director of water systems.

He said the lifespan of sewer systems is about 50 years and during the next five to 10 years, much of the system will approach that age.

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## Sewer

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"We have to replace about 10 miles per year or reline and rehab," Rothlisberger said. "Right now, we're able to replace about 2 miles per year."

County commissioners would need to approve a resolution for any increase to go into effect.

"When we raised the rates in 2002 we had in that resolution that in 2003 and every odd year ever after, they have to analyze their revenues versus expenditures and report to the commissioners every other year whether they need an increase in the water or sewer rates," Commissioner Daniel P. Troy said.

The commissioner said residents can be proud the county sewer system has a 100 percent success rate in not discharging untreated

sewage into the waterways, unlike other systems that have been forced to do so when they receive high volumes.

"This is the price we pay to keep Lake Erie clean and to be good for the environment," Troy said.

Martin said the Utilities Department's sewer rates also are lower than most other systems.

He cited a 2009 residential sewer rate survey by the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency based on 7.756 gallons per month.

Martin said the survey cited quarterly rates of \$83 for Willoughby sewer customers, \$115.50 for suburb communities within the Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District, and \$121.75 for Painesville sewer customers.

Commissioner Raymond E. Sines noted Utilities Department employees have not had raises or step

increases for the past four years, so he asked how much of the increased revenue would be dedicated to improve the infrastructure.

Martin said if the additional dollars didn't go the address infrastructure the agency would begin to have a deficit.

"We had 109 employees in 2001, now we have 89," he said.

"We're always looking at new technology and ways to save money and that has helped us save money."

What do you think about increasing sewer rates to help the Lake County Department of Utilities? Leave your thoughts at [News-Herald.com](http://News-Herald.com).

